

NEWS RELEASE



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Attorney General Lockyer Announces Overall Substance Use Among Students Remain At Lowest Levels

Eleventh Biennial Study Includes New Data On Abuse of Prescription Painkillers

(SACRAMENTO) – Attorney General Bill Lockyer, Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell and Kathryn P. Jett, Director of the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs today released the results of the *11th Biennial California Student Survey (CSS)* that showed high school students’ drug and alcohol use during 2005 and 2006 remain low after significant declines earlier this decade.

“This study finds overall that students in California are not drinking alcohol or taking drugs as much as they were a few years ago,” said Lockyer. “Even though there have been steady declines since 2000, the level of involvement remains troubling. The challenge ahead of us is to lower students’ drug and alcohol use even more.”

Despite the encouraging aspects of the study’s findings, they also revealed an ongoing need to address the prevalence of heavy drug use and binge drinking. According to the study, California youth who do drink tend to be heavy drinkers, similar to their peers nationally. Excessive alcohol use was reported by 27 percent of 11th graders, 14 percent of 9th graders and 5.5 percent of 7th graders. Measures of excessive alcohol use include drinking to get drunk or binge drinking, which is 5 drinks in a row on three days during the past 30 days. The study’s findings show heavy or high-risk drug use was reported by 17 percent of 11th graders, 11 percent of 9th and 4 percent of 7th graders. High-risk drug use is defined as frequent polydrug use, weekly or daily marijuana use, or use of cocaine or crack.

Among the 2005-2006 findings, the CSS confirmed that significant declines in substance use that began in 1998 have now leveled off, with current results similar to the last survey in 2004. Drinking alcohol, the most popular substance with teens, was reported by 61 percent of 11th graders, 47 percent of 9th and 27 percent of 7th graders in the six months prior to the survey. Use of marijuana, the second most popular substance, was reported by 30 percent of 11th graders, 19 percent of 9th and 7 percent of 7th graders.

As a result of these declines, the 2005-2006 CSS reported that rates of abstinence, or no alcohol or drug use, remain at the highest levels ever for all three grades: 35 percent of 11th graders, 50 percent of 9th, and 70 percent of 7th graders have not used any alcohol or drugs in the six months prior to the survey.

(MORE)

"Students who are healthy and sober come to school ready to learn. I remain very concerned about student drug and alcohol use," said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell. "The California Department of Education is committed to school based programs that are scientifically proven to be effective in preventing drug use. We also want all students to have access to the help they need to stop drinking or using drugs."

A new survey question asked students whether they used prescription drugs such as OxyContin, Vicodin and Percodan to get high. The results showed that prescription drugs were abused by 15 percent of 11th graders, 9 percent of 9th graders and 4 percent of 7th graders, making these painkillers the most popular substance after alcohol and marijuana.

"California's investment in prevention programs has contributed to the reduction in student drug and alcohol use during the past eight years," said Kathryn P. Jett, Director of the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs. "But the numbers also indicate we may be leveling off and based on the results of the survey, we will focus our attention on the excessive user as well as illicit prescription drug use."

While these findings indicate that students' substance use has continued at the lowest recorded levels since the survey began in 1985, there are some minor increases in 7th graders' use of several alcohol and marijuana measures that are reason for concern.

"The number of teens who are not drinking alcohol or using drugs is encouraging," said Lockyer. "Researchers have shown that the longer teens delay their substance use, the more likely it is they will not abuse drugs and alcohol as adults. Prevention works, and with our partners in education and alcohol and drug abuse prevention -- I remain committed to further reducing substance abuse among our youth."

According to the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration last month, California's long-term trends mirror recent federal findings that national drug use among youth ages 12-17 continue to decline from 2002 levels.

Conducted every two years since 1985, the survey is sponsored by the Attorney General's Office to measure substance and alcohol use by California students in grades 7, 9 and 11. Co-sponsored by the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs and the Department of Education, the 2005-2006 survey collected data from 10,638 randomly-selected students in 113 middle and high schools between September 2005 to February 2006. More information on the results are available on the Attorney General's Crime and Violence Prevention webpage at www.safestate.org/CSS.

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